(a) whether the Prime Minister was assured that Nepal would not permit any anti-India or terrorist activities from its soil;

(b) whether the question of curbing and preventing anti-India activities from Nepali soil was discussed during his, recent visit to Nepal;

(c) if so, in what precise context the question was considered and what was the outcome thereof; and

(d) the steps taken by the Napali Government so far in that direction?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRIMATI KAMALA SINHA): (a) to (d) During the Prime Minister's visit to Nepal the determination of the two countries was reiterated to work closely and fight the scourage of terrorism. The Prime Minister directed their Home Secretaries to meet at the earliest to develop and understanding in this regard. They also renewed their commitment not to allow their territory to be used for activities directed against or prejudicial to the security of the other. They also desired that the meeting of the Joint Working Group on Border management be held at the earliest.

Bangladesh-India-Sri-Lanka-Thailand Economic Cooperation Pact

178. SHRI SUSHIL KUMAR SAMBHAJIRAO SHINDE:
SHRIMATI VEENA VERMA:

Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether a Banladesh-India-Sri Lanka-Thailand Economic cooperation pact has been signed recently between the four countries, with a view to synergise their resources and technical strenghth;

(b) if so, whether a number of joint initiatives and ventures, including a joint airline to cater to the religious tourism circuit in the four participating countries, are contemplated under the pact; if so, the details thereof; and

(c) the steps taken and being taken in pursuance of the pact?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI SALEEM IQBAL SHERWANI):

(a) to (c) Yes Sir, The main purpose of this subregional grouping involving Bangladesh-India-Sri Lanka-Thailand which was formally launched at the Ministerial Meeting in Bangkok on June 6, 1997, is to identify and synergise cooperation in areas such as trade, investment, industry, technology, human resource development, tourism, agriculture, energy, infrastructure and transportation. Specific projects in the identified areas of cooperation will be developed based on studies to be conducted by the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and pacific (ESCAP) and concepts developed by Member States themselves. Futher steps will be taken after the proposed study by ESCAP has been received. The idea of a joint airline to cater to tourism pilgrimage circuits was put forward by Thailand and is to be studies further at experts level after the Thai concept paper is received.

Staff Strength of Diplomatic Missions in the Erstwhile Soviet Union

179. SHRI ASHOK MITRA: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) the current staff strength of our diplomatic missions based in different locations of the erstwhile Soviet Union;

(b) the broad areas of responsibility assigned to them; and

(c) whether any fresh mutual treaties of frindship are contemplated to be signed with these countries;

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI SALEEM IQBAL SHERWANI): (a) At Present, India has eight Embassies and three Consulates General in different locations in the erstwhile Soviet Union. The total approved strength of all these Embassies and Consulates covered under the latest sanction of the Ministry of